

## **Acceptance of Male Rape Myths Among College Men and Women**

**Cindy Struckman-Johnson and David Struckman-Johnson**

*University of South Dakota*

*College students (157 men and 158 women; predominantly white middle class) from psychology courses at a midwestern university rated their agreement with statements reflecting myths that male rape cannot happen, involves victim blame, and is not traumatic to men. Statements varied by whether the rape perpetrator was a man or woman. Results showed that a majority of subjects disagreed with all myth statements, but most strongly with trauma myths. Percentages of disagreement with myths for subject groups ranged from 51% to 98%. Women were significantly more rejecting of rape myths than were men. Subjects were more likely to accept myths in which the rape perpetrator was female rather than male. Subjects' past victim experience with sexual coercion was not related to rape myth acceptance. Results are discussed in terms of societal attitudes toward rape and sex role stereotypes.*

In recent years, researchers have investigated cultural myths about the causes and effects of rape of women by men. In classic works by Burt (1980) and Field (1978), it was established that many Americans indeed believed myths such as that women falsely accuse men of rape, rape is not harmful, women want or enjoy rape, and women cause or deserve rape by indiscreet or risky behavior. These myths, in the opinion of many, have contributed to a "rape-supportive" climate in which victims are held somewhat responsible for their own rape, whereas perpetrators' actions are excused or viewed as justifiable (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980, 1991; Lottes, 1988; Quackenbush, 1989).

The purpose of the present study was to document the extent to which male and female college students accept myths about rape of men. The literature on male sexual assault reveals several false beliefs and prejudicial

stereotypes about the dynamics of male rape. Foremost, there seems to be a belief that, outside of prisons, "Male rape can't happen." According to Growth and Burgess (1980), Americans view men as initiating and controlling sexual activity—not as being the targets of assault. Many people assume that an adult male is too big or too strong to be overpowered and forced into sex. Others question how a man can achieve erection and perform sexually in a coercive situation (Miller, 1983; Sarrel & Masters, 1982; Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988).

Regardless of public perceptions, a substantial number of nonincarcerated men are sexually assaulted each year. According to 1989 crime records, about 1 per 10,000 men over age 12, or approximately 9700 men for the total U.S. male population, are victims of rape or attempted rape each year (U.S. Department of Justice, 1990). Studies of several rape crisis centers have revealed that from 6% to 20% of treated rape victims are men (Calderwood, 1987; Forman, 1982; Kaufman, Divasto, Jackson, Voorhees, & Christy, 1980). These estimates may be conservative given that experts believe most male rapes are not reported (Calderwood, 1987; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Kaufman et al., 1980).

One of the best community-based estimates of male sexual assault is provided by Sorenson, Stein, Siegel, Golding, & Burnam's (1987) survey of a representative sample of Los Angeles households. Of 1480 men interviewed, 7.2% said that they had experienced at least one incident of pressured or forced sexual contact as adults. In 39% of these cases (about 3% of the total male sample), the assault involved sexual intercourse.

Male sexual assault seems to be particularly high among college student populations. In a review of several campus surveys of coercive sex, Struckman-Johnson (1991) found that from 12%–16% of male subjects indicated that they had been pressured or forced to have sexual intercourse with a dating partner. Physical force was used in less than 1% to as many as 7% of the incidents reported in the surveys.

Researchers have found that men are raped by the full range of strategies used against female victims. They are violently attacked with weapons, intimidated by threats or blackmail, entrapped in rooms, cars, or tied to beds, assaulted while too intoxicated to resist or give consent, or pressured by powerful or trusted authority figures. Their assailants are strangers and acquaintances, men and women, and individuals or groups (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Johnson & Shrier, 1987; Mezey & King, 1989; Myers, 1989; Sorenson et al., 1987). Despite male victims' feelings of fear, anxiety, or lack of desire, they can be physically stimulated and forced to perform in oral, vaginal, and anal sex (Sarrel & Masters, 1982; Mezey & King, 1989).

Another myth discussed in the literature is that "Male rape victims are to blame for their own rape." According to Groth and Burgess (1980), male victims are reluctant to report their rape in part because of a societal belief that a man should be able to protect himself from sexual assault. Many male victims feel that because they failed to fight off or escape from an assailant, they are responsible for what happened. If victims do report the rape, their feelings of blame may be reinforced by incredulous and critical reactions of police and medical personnel (Collins, 1982; Krueger, 1985; Miller, 1983). Some male victims—especially gay men—are made to feel that they "asked for" the rape by their own indiscreet or risky behavior (Krueger, 1985). Although there is no literature to date that conceptualizes male rape as an act in which the victim is "blameless," one can take the position that any victim of rape—male or female—should not be held responsible for the aggressive actions of their assailant.

A third myth is "Getting raped doesn't really upset men." According to Anderson (1988), many people think that male sexual assault is not really a serious matter. Because our society believes that men are emotionally strong and stoic, it is assumed that male rape victims will be able to "tough it out" and cope with the experience (Krueger, 1985; Miller, 1983).

Although there is not yet a large data base on male victims of sexual assault, several studies have indicated that men can be seriously affected by coercive sexual experiences. In a study of 204 men, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (in press) found that 22 of 69 subjects (32%) who had experienced coercive touch or intercourse rated the incident as having a strong negative effect. Most of the reported incidents involved low-coercive pressure tactics and intoxication, although about 12% involved force or threats. Studies of small samples of men who have experienced forceful sexual assault have documented significant emotional effects such as depression, suicidal ideation, intense anxiety and guilt, amnesia, sexual dysfunction, loss of self-esteem and trust in relationships, and long-term problems with sexual behavior, relationships, and masculine gender identity (Goyer & Eddleman, 1984; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Kazniak, Nassbaum, Berren, & Santiago, 1988; Mezey & King, 1989; Myers, 1989).

### *Hypotheses*

The present study was undertaken to find out if college men and women believe in male rape myths. A sample of college students were asked to indicate their agreement with a series of statements reflecting the "can't happen," "victim blame," and "victim trauma" dimensions of male rape myths. It was predicted that there would be strong agreement with at

least some of the myths, but that the level of agreement would vary among myth dimensions.

A second purpose was to determine if there are gender differences in the level of acceptance of male rape myths. Past research has shown that women are less likely than men to accept female rape myths (Field, 1978; Giacomassi & Dull, 1986; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987; Margolin, Miller, & Moran, 1989). In line with these findings, it was predicted that female subjects would show less agreement with male rape myths. The rationale was that women—shown to be generally more empathetic to female rape victims (Dietz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984)—would generalize this sympathy to male victims of rape. Thus, they would be more likely than male subjects to believe that a man can be raped, that he is not to blame for it, and that he would be upset by the incident.

A third prediction was that subjects' history of victimization would influence their acceptance of male rape myths. Although Burt's own research (1980) did not support the influence of past sexual victimization, the authors wanted to test this variable for the unique case of male rape myths. It seemed possible that male subjects who had experienced sexual coercion would perhaps identify with or have greater feelings of empathy toward a male rape victim. According to Quackenbush (1989), an "empathy factor" may reduce rape-supportive attitudes of masculine sex-typed males. Thus, it was hypothesized that a group of male and female subjects with victim experience would be less accepting of male rape myths than subjects who had never been coerced.

A final purpose was to determine if acceptance of myths differed if the rape perpetrator in the myth was described as a man or a woman. In the literature, several authors suggested that rape myths operate more strongly for cases when a man is raped by a woman—especially the "can't happen" myth. Anderson (1988) argued that society assumes a man cannot be raped by a woman due to the average male advantage in size and strength. Sarrel and Masters (1982) wrote that many people believe that it is "almost impossible" for a man to achieve erection if he is sexually assaulted by a woman.

The blame factor for men assaulted by women may be stronger for several reasons. First, people may believe that a man should be able to protect himself from the so-called weaker sex. Masters (1986) wrote that several male clients would not report female assault because they feared being perceived as weak and unmasculine. Also, a female-assaulted man may be viewed as encouraging the act in some way because society assumes heterosexual men are always motivated to have sex with women (Parrot, 1988; Smith et al., 1988). In fact, Smith et al. (1988) found that a hypothetical male victim raped by female strangers was judged more likely to

have encouraged or initiated the act than was a male victim raped by male strangers.

Smith et al. (1988) suggested that the stereotype of male "sexual motivation" also leads people to assume that men will not be seriously upset by female sexual assault. They determined that a hypothetical male victim of female multistranger rape was judged as experiencing more pleasure and less stress than a victim of male multistranger rape. Similarly, Musialowski and Kelly (1987) found that a hypothetical male victim of female gang rape, compared to a heterosexual male victim of male gang rape, was perceived as more likely to enjoy the activity and less deserving of sympathy.

In contrast to these beliefs, research has shown that women, although much less likely than men to use violent methods, are capable of using a wide variety of coercive tactics to have sex with men and boys (Johnson & Shrier, 1987; Sarrel & Masters, 1982; Struckman-Johnson, 1988, 1991). In fact, the majority of cases of forced sexual contact and intercourse reported by adult males in the Sorenson et al. study (1987) were perpetrated by a female acquaintance or intimate (Sorenson, personal communication, April 1989). Men and boys assaulted by women can be quite traumatized by the incident (Sarrel & Masters, 1982), and may respond in a similar way to either female or male assault (Johnson & Shrier, 1987).

In summary, the final hypothesis was that subjects would show more acceptance of rape myths in which the perpetrator was a woman. That is, they would more strongly agree that the rape of a man by a woman is less likely to happen, involves more victim blame, and is less upsetting to the victim than is the case for a man raped by another man.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

The original subject pool consisted of 412 student volunteers drawn from introductory psychology, social psychology, and sex roles courses. All courses attracted students from a large variety of majors on campus. The sample was drawn from a college population of over 6000 predominantly middle-class students—95% Caucasian, 2% Native American, and 3% other minorities.

Subjects were offered extra credit for participating in the study. Because the courses had a majority of female students, and all interested students were allowed to participate, the original sample had significantly more women ( $n = 250$ ) than men ( $n = 162$ ).

Five men and 14 women over the age of 30 were eliminated to increase homogeneity of age and dating status. In order to have near-equal gender groups for our analyses, a computer program was used to eliminate at random approximately 78 female subjects. The final sample consisted of 365 subjects (157 men and 158 women). Mean ages were 20.9 years ( $SD = 2.10$ ) for men and 20.2 years for women ( $SD = 1.81$ ).

### *Instruments*

*Rape Myth Measures.* Six statements were created that, on face value, reflected the three rape myth dimensions. Because each item was repeated for a male and female perpetrator, there were a total of 12 rape myth statements. The statements, modeled after some of the items in Field's (1978) Attitudes Toward Rape Scale, consisted of short, simple sentences that explicitly stated the myth. To minimize a response set bias, 4 of the 12 statements were worded so that agreement reflected rejection of the myth.

The following statements were used to assess the myth that male rape cannot happen:

It is impossible for a man (woman) to rape a man. (Impossible)

Even a big, strong man can be raped by another man (a woman). (Strong)—reverse scoring

Statements reflecting the myth that men are to blame for their rape were

Most men who are raped by a man (woman) are somewhat to blame for not being more careful. (Careful)

Most men who are raped by a man (woman) are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the man (woman). (Escape)

Statements for the trauma myth were

Most men who are raped by a man (woman) are very upset by the incident. (Upset)—reverse scoring

Most men who are raped by a man (woman) do not need counseling after the incident. (Counseling)

Subjects were instructed to mark the response which "best reflects your agreement or disagreement with the following statements" on a Likert-format scale, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*moderately disagree*), 3 (*slightly disagree*), 4 (*slightly agree*), 5 (*moderately agree*), to 6 (*strongly agree*).

In order that all subjects had a clear definition of the act of male rape, we preceded the questions with the following paragraph: "In this survey, male rape is defined as a situation in which a man is forced to engage in oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with another person—either male or female. Rape refers to the use of physical force, use of weapons, threat of harm, blackmail, unfair use of authority, or use of drugs/alcohol to obtain sex."

The 12 myth items were placed in the first section of the questionnaire, preceded by several demographic items. The male perpetrator items appeared first (random order), followed by a parallel order of female perpetrator items.

*Victim Experience.* In a section following the rape myth items, subjects were asked the following questions to assess past experience with coercive sex:

Since the age of 16, have you ever been pressured or forced by a person of the OPPOSITE SEX to have sexual contact which involved touching of sexual parts of your body (but not intercourse)? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_\_\_

Since the age of 16, have you ever been pressured or forced by a person of the OPPOSITE SEX to have sexual contact which involved having sexual intercourse? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Not Sure \_\_\_\_\_

The questions were repeated in the exact form for a perpetrator of the SAME SEX. (Subjects also were asked to give more information about the dynamics and effects of the most recent episode of same-sex and opposite-sex coercion, but these data were not relevant for the present study.)

### *Procedures*

At the beginning of the lecture hour of the sampled classes, students were given a written consent form, which stated that the survey was anonymous, that it was voluntary, and that it contained sensitive questions about attitudes toward rape and their own sexual experiences. Those who wanted to participate were instructed to pick up a survey outside of the classroom door at the end of the hour.

Students were instructed orally, on the consent form, and again at the beginning of the questionnaire to complete the survey in a private place and not to let anyone see their answers. They were asked to return the questionnaire the next class period, and to place the surveys and signed consent forms in separate collection boxes. Over 90% of the students in the classes participated.

## RESULTS

### *Major Analysis*

A 2 (subject sex) by 2 (victim experience) by 2 (sex of perpetrator in myth item) by 6 (myth item) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using the agreement scores on the rape myth statements as the dependent measure. The victim experience factor was created by categorizing as "victimized" any subject who answered yes to having experienced as an adult either forced touch or intercourse from a member of the opposite or same sex. The victim group consisted of 41 men and 85 women, and the non-victim group contained 116 men and 73 women.

The subject sex and victim experience variables were between-group factors, whereas myth item and perpetrator sex were within-group factors. In order to control for effects due to correlations among repeated measures, within subjects effects and interactions including within subjects effects were tested using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

A summary of the analysis is in Table I, and means and standard deviations of agreement scores for the factor group are in Table II. Results determined that there were significant main effects for myth item ( $p < .0001$ ), subject sex ( $p < .0001$ ), and perpetrator sex ( $p < .0001$ ), but not for victim experience. There were significant two-way interactions between myth item and subject sex ( $p < .0001$ ), and myth item and perpetrator sex

**Table I.** ANOVA Summary Table for Level of Acceptance of Male Rape Myths<sup>a</sup>

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <
Subject Sex	1,311	31.59	.0001
Victimized	1,311	0.28	.5962
Subject Sex × Victimized	1,311	0.99	.3214
Myth	5,307	15.87	.0001
Myth × Subject Sex	5,307	5.45	.0001
Myth × Victimized	5,307	0.37	.8707
Myth × Subject Sex × Victimized	5,307	1.17	.3253
Perpetrator Sex	1,311	230.54	.0001
Perpetrator Sex × Subject Sex	1,311	2.93	.0880
Perpetrator Sex × Victimized	1,311	0.01	.9365
Perpetrator Sex × Subject Sex × Victimized	1,311	0.05	.8169
Myth × Perpetrator Sex	5,307	19.07	.0001
Myth × Perpetrator Sex × Subject Sex	5,307	4.31	.0008
Myth × Perpetrator Sex × Victimized	5,307	1.34	.2486
Myth × Perpetrator Sex × Subject Sex × Victimized	5,307	0.98	.4296

<sup>a</sup>Within-subjects effects and interactions including within-subjects effects were tested using MANOVA.



Table II. Means for Level of Acceptance by Subject Sex, Perpetrator Sex, Victimization, and Male Rape Myth<sup>a</sup>

Condition	N	Myth						Across myths
		Impossible	Strong	Escape	Careful	Upset	Counseling	
Male subject	157	2.38 (1.25)	2.78 (1.24)	2.77 (1.18)	2.70 (1.25)	2.22 (0.87)	2.16 (0.93)	2.50 (0.73)
Male perpetrator	157	2.16 (1.64)	2.66 (1.33)	2.31 (1.29)	2.31 (1.30)	1.45 (0.88)	1.69 (0.96)	2.10 (0.71)
Victimized	41	1.80 (1.25)	2.66 (1.33)	2.51 (1.53)	2.46 (1.36)	1.27 (0.50)	1.63 (0.97)	2.06 (0.65)
Not victimized	116	2.28 (1.75)	2.66 (1.46)	2.23 (1.20)	2.26 (1.28)	1.52 (0.97)	1.72 (0.96)	2.11 (0.73)
Female perpetrator	157	2.59 (1.61)	2.90 (1.57)	3.23 (1.43)	3.10 (1.48)	2.99 (1.37)	2.63 (1.28)	2.91 (0.96)
Victimized	41	2.49 (1.61)	2.61 (1.56)	3.24 (1.51)	3.22 (1.35)	3.00 (1.43)	2.78 (1.26)	2.89 (0.93)
Not victimized	116	2.63 (1.62)	3.01 (1.56)	3.22 (1.41)	3.05 (1.44)	2.99 (1.35)	2.58 (1.29)	2.91 (0.97)
Female subject	158	2.11 (1.22)	2.33 (0.99)	2.11 (0.97)	1.86 (0.94)	2.00 (0.90)	1.75 (0.83)	2.02 (0.65)
Male perpetrator	158	2.01 (1.76)	2.06 (1.17)	1.61 (1.00)	1.64 (0.88)	1.46 (0.99)	1.42 (0.85)	1.70 (0.64)
Victimized	85	2.21 (1.85)	2.14 (1.29)	1.64 (1.04)	1.62 (0.93)	1.53 (1.09)	1.44 (0.94)	1.76 (0.68)
Not victimized	73	1.79 (1.63)	1.97 (1.00)	1.58 (0.96)	1.66 (0.82)	1.37 (0.86)	1.41 (0.74)	1.63 (0.59)
Female perpetrator	158	2.21 (1.33)	2.60 (1.34)	2.61 (1.32)	2.08 (1.16)	2.54 (1.36)	2.08 (1.14)	2.35 (0.85)
Victimized	85	2.19 (1.34)	2.66 (1.41)	2.65 (1.41)	2.09 (1.21)	2.66 (1.48)	2.21 (1.20)	2.41 (0.90)
Not victimized	73	2.23 (1.32)	2.53 (1.25)	2.57 (1.22)	2.07 (1.10)	2.41 (1.20)	1.92 (1.06)	2.29 (0.78)

<sup>a</sup>Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

( $p < .0001$ ), and a significant three-way interaction among myth item, subject sex, and perpetrator sex ( $p < .0008$ ).

Because victim experience had no significant interactions or main effect, the factor was eliminated from additional analyses.

### *Post Hoc Analyses*

In order to interpret the third-order interaction effect, a series of subject sex by perpetrator sex ANOVAS were conducted on agreement scores within each of the 6 myth items. Subject sex by perpetrator sex interactions were identified in the careful, upset, and counseling myth items ( $p$ 's ranged from .0001 to .0105), but not in the impossible, strong, and escape items, thus accounting for the third-order interaction. As shown by the means in Fig. 1, men and women had more similar reactions to male-female perpetrator variations of the "can't happen" myth items than they did for the blame and trauma items.

For the subject sex by myth item interaction, post hoc tests showed that there were significant subject sex effects for all 6 myth items. Although differences between male and female responses varied in magnitude by myth item—thus accounting for the interaction—the direction of the sex difference was consistent. Confirming the hypothesis, female subjects showed stronger disagreement with rape myths than did male subjects ( $p$ 's ranged from .0001 to .0275).

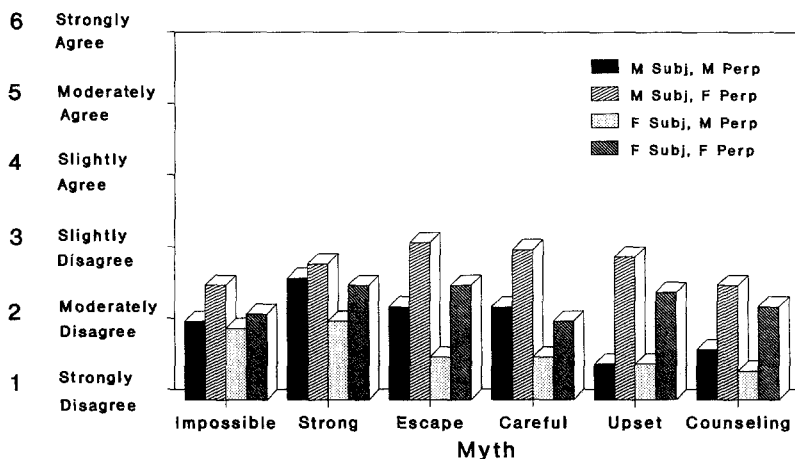


Fig. 1. Level of myth acceptance as a function of subject sex and perpetrator sex.

Post hoc tests for the perpetrator sex by myth item interaction revealed that the perpetrator sex effect was significant for all myth items except impossible. In the remaining items, the magnitude of subjects' agreement with male vs. female perpetrator items varied, but the direction was consistent. As hypothesized, subjects disagreed more strongly with myths in which a man was raped by another man, as compared to myths in which a man was raped by a woman ( $p$ 's ranged from .0001 to .0485).

Although the main effect for myth item was qualified by interactions, it was determined which myth items were most and least accepted. A series of multivariate profile contrast tests were made between item means ranked from lowest to highest. All 6 myth item means were found to differ significantly from adjacent items ( $p$ 's ranged from .0001 to .0190).

Subjects generally disagreed most strongly with items stating that male rape victims do not need counseling ( $m = 1.95$ ) and that victims are not upset by the rape ( $m = 2.11$ ). Subjects were most likely to agree with items stating that strong men cannot be raped ( $m = 2.55$ ) and that a man should be able to escape from the assailant ( $m = 2.44$ ).

Contrary to prediction, subjects did not show strong agreement with any one myth item. Scores ranged from 1.95 to 2.55 on a scale where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 3 reflects mild disagreement.

*Percentages of Rape Myth Acceptance.* To help describe the above results in terms of overall agreement with myths, the percentages of male and female subjects who either disagreed (scored 1–3) or agreed (scored 4–6) for male- and female-perpetrated versions of the 6 myth items were calculated. For the “can’t happen” myth, about 22% of the men and 18% of the women agreed that it is impossible to rape a man—regardless of perpetrator sex. Twenty-three percent of men and 9% of women agreed that a strong man cannot be raped by another man, but more agreed (30% of the men and 18% of the women) that a strong man cannot be raped by a woman.

For the blame myth, 22% of the men and 5% of the women agreed that “a man who is raped by another man is somewhat to blame for not being careful.” When the perpetrator was described as a woman, agreement rose to 44% of the men and 12% of the women. A similar shift occurred for the escape myth: only 22% of the men and 8% of the women agreed that a man should be able to get away from another man, but 49% of the men and 27% of the women agreed he should be able to get away from a woman.

The trauma statements, least accepted by all subjects, showed similar differences. Only 4% of the men and 3% of the women agreed that a man raped by another man is not upset by the incident. However, 35% of the men and 22% of the women agreed with the statement when the man was

raped by a woman. The shift was not quite as strong for the counseling statements: 7% of the men and 2% of the women agreed that a man raped by another man does not need counseling, but 22% and 13%, respectively, agreed when the perpetrator was said to be a woman.

## DISCUSSION

The major finding of our study was that, contrary to expectation, the majority of the sample of college men and women disagreed with all rape myth items. Of the three dimensions of rape myths presented—"can't happen," "victim blame," and "victim trauma"—subjects were strongest in their disagreement with trauma statements, which said that male rape victims are not upset or do not need counseling.

The lack of strong evidence for acceptance of male rape myths was somewhat surprising. The authors thought that college students would hold stereotypic beliefs about male rape because the issue is so seldom discussed in the media or in educational forums. Instead, the findings indicate that students are aware of and sympathetic to the case of male rape.

One possible explanation is that students' attitudes have been affected by the prevailing social climate of receptivity and understanding for female rape victims. For example, Giacopassi and Dull (1986) found that only 18% of male and female college students agreed with myths that a woman cannot be forced to have intercourse against her will and that female rape victims are a little to blame for the crime. Similar percentages of agreement were found for the "can't happen" and "blame" male rape myths in the present study.

However, a demand characteristic may have influenced the magnitude of acceptance. In retrospect, it seems possible that subjects may have been "educated" about male rape by the definition provided in the instruction set. Perhaps the presence of the definition dispelled some of the very stereotypes that the authors had intended to measure. On the other hand, the presence of the definition guaranteed that subjects' responses were based upon a common and correct definition of male rape. Future researchers may want to test for a definition effect in pilot work.

Despite the overall low level of acceptance of rape myths, there were several significant differences in the level of acceptance depending upon subject gender and gender of the perpetrator in the myth statements. As predicted, women were significantly less accepting of male rape myths than were men. It is important to emphasize, however, that the gender difference was one in which both sexes disagreed with the myths, but that the women were more extreme in their disagreement.

Other researchers who have found that men are more likely than women to accept female rape myths have argued that the difference reflects men's traditional attitudes toward women (Field, 1978) or a greater tolerance of sexual aggression toward women (Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987). Our findings of a typical sex difference for beliefs about male rape victims suggests that the difference may not necessarily reflect men's reactions to a female victim—but to a rape victim in general. Perhaps, men, compared to women, are less aware of or less emotionally involved with the rape dilemma, and consequently respond less extremely to attitude statements.

It was also found, as predicted, that male rape myths do operate more strongly when the perpetrator is described as a woman. Subjects were more likely to agree that the rape of a man by a woman is less likely to happen to a strong man, involves more victim blame, and is less traumatic than is rape by another man. The perpetrator sex effect was most clearly shown in responses to the victim blame myth. Although about 20% of the men agreed that a man raped by another man was to blame for being careless or for not escaping, the percentage of agreement more than doubled when the perpetrator was a woman. Female subjects showed similar but less dramatic shifts in agreement. This finding shows that at least a sizable percentage of subjects—especially men—believed that male rape victims are at fault for not avoiding a female assailant.

The trauma items also showed clear differences for perpetrator sex. Whereas less than 5% of male and female subjects agreed that a man would not be upset by male rape, agreement shifted to 35% for the men and 22% of the women when the perpetrator was said to be a woman. This result supports previous work that has shown that men raped by female strangers are viewed as less harmed and less deserving of sympathy than are men raped by male strangers (Musialowski & Kelley, 1987; Smith et al., 1988).

Why would subjects believe that a male victim of female rape is less upset than a victim of male assault? One likely explanation proposed by Smith et al. (1988) is that people assume heterosexual men want sex with women in any circumstance. Thus, even when the sex is forced by the woman, the man is seen as benefiting and perhaps even as enjoying the episode. Another possibility is that people may assume that a female assailant would use less violent means of force and cause less injury to a man than would a male assailant. A third alternative is that people may believe that an act of rape by a man is motivated by power or aggression, but perceive an act of rape by a woman as motivated by strong sexual attraction or an intent for romantic seduction.

The prediction that past victimization experience would affect responses to male rape myths was not supported. It was expected that having

a coercive experience involving touching of sexual parts or intercourse would cause subjects to identify with or feel more empathy toward a hypothetical rape victim. Although one cannot rule out the existence of such an empathy factor, it seems likely that subjects' responses to male rape myth statements were mediated by other variables. The failure of other researchers to find an effect for past sexual victimization for acceptance of female rape myths (Burt, 1980; Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987) supports this opinion.

In conclusion, this study serves as a preliminary investigation of beliefs about male rape among college men and women. Although it was determined that a sample of college students did not generally believe in male rape myths, results showed that women were more rejecting of rape myths than were men, and that all subjects were less rejecting of rape myths in which a woman, rather than a man, is the assailant.

Since there is little or no research on male rape myths, there are numerous possibilities for future investigations. One obvious recommendation is to assess beliefs in male rape myths with a greater variety of measures and, eventually, to develop a "male rape myth scale." The inventory of male rape myths could be expanded to include beliefs such as that only feminine-looking or homosexual men are raped by other men (Groth & Burgess, 1980).

It would be important to assess acceptance of male rape myths in community populations, especially in groups who are likely to encounter and treat male rape victims. Although the sample of college students in the present study rejected such beliefs, different results may be found among police, legal and medical authorities.

The ultimate goal of research on this topic, in the authors' opinion, is the investigation of the relationship between male rape myth acceptance and underreporting of male sexual assault. To the extent men believe that being sexually assaulted reflects personal blame or weakness, they are unlikely to report the incident. To the extent that police, medical, and legal authorities accept male rape myths, they will fail to ask male victims if rape has occurred, or may respond inappropriately if rape has clearly happened. Consequently, a cycle of silence is maintained.

Continued research on beliefs about male rape will help remedy this situation. If rape myth acceptance can be documented, one can then determine whether the beliefs are indeed related to reporting, to treatment, and to justice received by male victims. At a minimum, research will stimulate awareness of the problem and encourage development of programs to counteract cultural misunderstandings of male rape.

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